

FREEDOM, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL.

BY REV. PRINCIPAL MACVICAR, D.D.

*Address delivered at St. John's French Church,
Montreal, 10th May, 1896.*

ACCEPT as final upon my subject the Apostolic declaration in Gal. v. : 1, "With freedom Christ set us free; stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage."

But what does this mean? It means that all true freedom comes from Jesus Christ. Unless we receive it from Him we do not possess it at all in its highest sense. He, and He alone, is the author of it. We are primarily indebted to Him, and not to legislative enactments, not to authority or power or efforts originating with men, for the enjoyment of real freedom. The honor and glory of procuring it is not ultimately traceable to Britain, or to British statesmen, but belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ; and we, as His loyal subjects, should exalt and praise Him accordingly—"Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins: and He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever, Amen."

But how is this? How is it that Christ has the power to confer upon us freedom? Are we not distinctly told that there is no power but of God; and the powers that be, are ordained of God? Yes, but Jesus Christ is God over all blessed for ever. He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. In Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily. All power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth, and, therefore, it belongs to Him alone to determine and establish the terms of human freedom.

How does he do so, or what is the nature of the freedom with which He invests us? I answer it is *Spiritual*, and as such consists in—

(1) *Deliverance from guilt and condemnation.*

We all enter the world in a deplorable condition of guilt. The very substance of our being is defiled. We were shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin; and we have greatly added to this miserable inheritance by our own voluntary conduct. We have gone astray from the womb speaking lies. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way." And O, how crooked and perverse these ways have been. Our sins have risen like mountains over our heads; and the righteous sentence has gone forth against us. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The fundamental factor, therefore, in our freedom, is deliverance from this sentence, from this death. This we have in Christ; for it is written, "there is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Those for whom he died cannot themselves die eternally; for their "life is hid with Christ in God, and

when Christ who is their life shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory." This is one priceless item of freedom. In this sense Christ makes us free. But spiritual freedom consists in—

(2) *Deliverance from the tyranny of sin in our hearts and lives.*

Sin makes us slaves—slaves of the world the flesh and the devil. This is awful drudgery and bondage, to be under the lash of this trinity of evil, to be forced to work hard—for "the way of transgressors is hard"—and for the sort of remuneration which sin offers, for "the wages of sin is death." "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption," and that in time and eternity. Now sin has a terribly firm grip upon us all. It has laid its iron grasp upon the very fibres of our being, and this can only be released by a Divine operation. The agency of Christ's Word and Christ's Divine Spirit can alone effect the work. If the truth shall make you free, then are ye free indeed. And "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." By becoming temples of the Holy Ghost, the power of the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life is broken—the spell, the fascination, the enslaving energy of indwelling sin is destroyed, because "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world"—even He "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God our Father." But spiritual freedom consists, still further, in—

(3) *Deliverance from a burdensome ritual.*

In this specific sense it was keenly appreciated by members of the Jewish nation, who really entered into the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free. They were long accustomed to a religious cult which involved heavy burdens. The numerous altars, sacrifices, restrictions, ceremonies, sacred feasts, and long journeys, required by the Hebrew ritual, in the case of many of the people, were undeniably burdensome. Through the carnality of the people, the growth of superstition among them, and the multitude of additions made to the divinely appointed order by the traditions of the elders, there was fastened upon their necks a yoke heavier than they could bear. And yet the tenacity with which they adhered to this state of things was amazing. Alas, do we not see the same thing everywhere in our own day! Poor human nature is unchanged. It still becomes accustomed to slavery under certain conditions, when it is almost imperceptibly gradual in its growth, and when skilfully invested with religious significance. The spiritual slave learns, if not to love, at least patiently to endure, the chain that binds him, and has often despised the generous, loving hand stretched out to pluck it asunder.